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## ATG Interviews Robert Miranda

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# ATG Interviews Robert Miranda

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by Katina Strauch (Editor, *Against the Grain*)

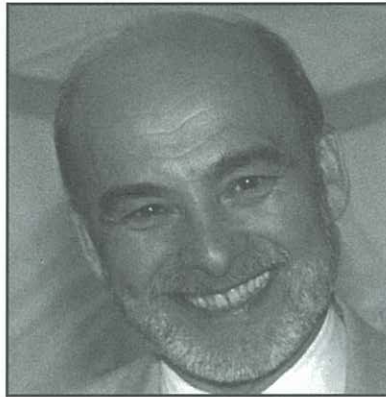
**ATG:** *I have known you a long time! I still remember with great delight coming to the LAPT board meeting at ALA. It was at the operatic restaurant "Asti's" in New York where Luciano Pavarotti was discovered. That was when you were with Pergamon, long before its sale in 1991. How did you get started in publishing?*

**RM:** A quick rundown of my early life. I was born in Brooklyn into a small Italian-American, first generation family with one brother and two sisters. After high school, I had numerous jobs with no plans or desire to go to college. I entered into a partnership with my brother and father in a bakery business. Soon Uncle Sam called, I activated my naval reserve status and entered the Navy for two years right after the Korean War. I served on Admiral staff for two years and was honorably discharged with a total of 8 years reserve and active duty. Got married while in the service to my high school girlfriend and had one child. The second was on the way when I left the service. Not knowing exactly what I wanted to do and with the bakery business sold, I was approached by a friend of my wife's family who asked me what my plans were. He asked if I'd like a job in publishing; my response was what does it pay. He said \$75.00 a week, and it would be in downtown New York City in the *Gourmet* fulfillment department. Not knowing what fulfillment meant, I said the salary was alright and I would give it a try.

I worked for *Gourmet* for exactly one year. Being a friend of the business manager was not the most comfortable position to be in so I resigned and accepted a job as circulation manager for a trade magazine called *Reproductions Review*, at \$100.00 per week. It sounded like it would be fun but it turned out to be a magazine serving small printing businesses. I stayed there for two years, and accepted a circulation manager job at *Super Market Publishing*, a controlled circulation magazine which served the Super Market and the emerging Discount Industry, all for \$125.00 per week. **Macfadden Bartell** purchased the company, and I stayed with them in their new trade division for another two years, doing circulation work and survey work for *Photo Play Magazine*. When I was asked to leave this job, a great story, to be told another time, I had five job offers and I selected, or should I say, we agreed that I should work for **Pergamon Press, Inc.**

**ATG:** *When was that and what was Pergamon like then?*

**RM:** When I joined Pergamon in 1965



they had 97 journals. Most of them had titles I couldn't even pronounce, let alone know what they were about. The salary was right and the opportunities seemed endless, and they were. After two years with the company, U.S. publisher, **Detlev Raymond**, asked me to take on more responsibility for editorial management and development. One of my first assignments was to act as the business manager for *The Columbia Journal of World Business*, which we published for the **Graduate School of Business, Columbia University**. After a short time I was appointed Vice President, and was earning \$225.00 a week. I only mention these salaries so that some of the younger people in publishing won't feel so bad as to what they are getting paid.

My first meeting with **Robert Maxwell** took place after three months in the company. I was warned by the officers that he was coming. This sounded like an ominous threat, which I soon found out was true. While I was working at my desk, he came up with the President of the company and said "so you're the new genius that we hired," picked up a piece of mail from my desk, read it and said, "so, genius, how would you deal with this customer?" I read the letter and gave him my answer. He told me I was an idiot, and proceeded to tell me what I should do, followed by "do you understand?" Never being known for keeping my mouth shut, I said "I understand what you said, but if I do it your way we will lose the customer; my way we will sell him more journals." He threw the letter on my desk and said "get to work." Twenty-six years later we still enjoyed bantering. I was only fired 5 times by Maxwell during that period of time. Each firing lasting 5 to 10 minutes.

**ATG:** *It wasn't long after that that Robert Maxwell lost control of the English company for the first time? What happened?*

**RM:** There were exciting times with the

**Pergamon** and Maxwell companies, like the time in 1970 when Maxwell decided that publishing and the computer business should come together. He proposed a merger with **Leaseco**, a computer leasing company, in order to bring about a transition from the old-fashioned ways of information storage and the better ways of exploiting the scientific literature. To make a great story short, Maxwell thought he could take over Leaseco, but **Saul Steinberg**, the **Steve Jobs** of the 70's had it in mind to take over **Pergamon**. I believe it was the first time in the history of the **English Stock Exchange** that an American company successfully gained control of a British company. **Leasco** bought up enough shares at \$22.00 and was able to convince the institutional accounts to vote with him. However, when **Leasco** tried to take over **Pergamon Press Inc.** a 75% owned subsidiary of PPL, the Courts ruled in favor of the minority stockholders and held PPL off for close to five years. Maxwell later prevailed by buying back stock at \$7.00 a share.

This was an interesting time for these two companies working for two different owners tied together by contracts and developing marketing and servicing customers just as one. The working relationship between the staffs was what held it together. Most of the PPL staff still had their allegiance to Maxwell; we in New York had him almost full time, although he still lived on the property where PPL was housed. It was at this time that my working relationship with **Brian Cox** really began. His staff and mine kept the internal politics out of the customer base. **Gilbert Richards**, the Managing Director and I continued to develop new products for the **Pergamon Group**. The rest is history.

**ATG:** *So when Maxwell sold Pergamon to Elsevier you stayed with him. An ill-fated decision!*

**RM:** The sale of **Pergamon** to **Elsevier** was ill-fated for the library community but not personally for me. Mine and **Karen Hunter's** job was to convince the **FTC** that such a sale would not be in restraint of trade. I still recall, as I am sure Karen does, the four or so hours of grilling that took place. As you know, **ALA** and **ARL** had filed papers against such a merger. I guess our presentations were convincing because the sale went through.

From my perspective, I did not want to work for **Elsevier**. I was however contacted by **Macmillan**, our parent in the United States, to work with **Elsevier** for 6 months (July 91—December 91) in order to assure a

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smooth transition and to work with the 70-some staff members who would lose their jobs.

**ATG:** *I am sure you have been asked this many times, but can you reminisce about Robert Maxwell and what it was like to work for him? Do you think that he killed himself?*

**RM:** Maxwell was a free-wheeling kind of guy. He was big in stature -- about 6'3, and I think at the time of his death, he must have weighed close to 300 lbs. Not only did he have charm and personality, but he had an ego as big. When he walked into a room you knew he was there, by his voice which was strong with his English accent, and we also said that there was less space in the room for more people to notice. He had a soft spot for scientists and researchers. They could ask anything of him and usually get it -- grants, cars, travel etc. We always had to find a way to fit these items into our operating budgets. He loved good food and wine, but we often had only salami sandwiches and a beer when the company was near broke in the 70's. Regardless of how broke he was, he always had a **Rolls Royce** and a good Cuban cigar, which I also enjoyed. He would make snap decisions, sometimes firing 20 or 30 people at a time. In **Pergamon**, he had a group of management people whom he felt he could abuse at any time and they would stay with the company. In England **Gilbert Richards**, **Brian Cox**, in New York, **Otto Rapp**, who you all knew, **Dr. Gray**, **L. Straka**, **S. Aboff**, **Inge Valentine**, and myself. When he was mad at management for whatever reason, he would ask for our resignations. I always refused, then was fired and rehired. But what he would do was fire members of your staff in order to make your life miserable. He always played the English office against the American office, in order to see how we would solve the problem. He was in my mind a practicing student of **Machiavelli**. I think he rewrote the book. The excitement of working with him will long be remembered; it was worth the occasional verbal abuse.

About his death: Bob was a dynamic individual, a take-charge person, worked at 150% when under pressure, and always had a new twist on how to get around problems. Having said that, I don't think that he would take his own life. Then again, knowing his sense of humor, there is the possibility that he did, just to confound every one. There is this rumor that he is still alive and on an island with Elvis.

**ATG:** *So tell us about your company. It's a publishing company, of course.*

When I negotiated out of my agreement with **Macmillan**, I decided that I had had enough of the corporate life. Loyalties have disappeared and everyone is uptight about the

next merger. Having spent close to 35 years in one aspect or other in the publishing business, I felt that I could start up a company that could bring published products to the marketplace at reasonable prices in order to assure the widest possible dissemination of the literature. Of the 140 journals I started when I was with **Pergamon**, 132 are still in existence. I decided I would start by publishing or acquiring journals. **Cognizant Communication Corp.** was set up in July 1992. I looked around and discovered that tourism and tourism-related research was a growth area; it has become the biggest business for many countries. My first journal was *Festival Management & Event Tourism*. I now publish four other tourism-related journals in addition to a small book series called *Tourism Dynamics*, with 4 books published to date. I also have journals in each of the STM fields, 17 to date.

**ATG:** *Well, those are certainly of interest here in Charleston! What journals have you bought?*

**RM:** *Acupuncture & Electro Therapeutics Research*, a journal I started 23 years ago, *Oncology Research*, and *Cell Transplantation*. I am very interested in cancer prevention since I lost my father to cancer. **Barbara Meyers** knew of my interest and suggested that I may want to restart a journal which had been published by **Williams & Wilkins**, *Cancer Prevention International*, which is now part of my list. For the time being I am not looking at additional acquisitions.

**ATG:** *Where is your office? How many employees do you have?*

My office is in Elmsford, the former home of **Pergamon**. In order to answer your question on how many employees, let me first explain how I intended to compete. First, I keep my overheads low by contracting all my work to individuals who were most qualified, many of whom had worked for me in the past. With all the mergers and downsizing going on, there is a wealth of talent out there who do not want to go back to the corporate grind and be downsized again. The use of computers and telecommunications makes working outside of an office environment ideal. So the answer is one. I am the only employee in the true sense of the word.

**ATG:** *How about your market? Do you sell to libraries and abroad?*

**RM:** Ideally I would like to sell more to libraries as the publications would receive the widest readership. The U.S. market for new publications is so tight that it is almost not worth spending money to promote to the library market. However, the rest of the world still continues to purchase new material and it represents close to 70% of my subscription base. This, of course, concerns me as an American publisher. There are so few of us nowadays. But looking at the literature, it appears that there are more scientific papers

being published in our journals from other than the U.S. It looks like the brain drain is returning overseas, which now is being reflective of our marketing results.

**ATG:** *How do you promote your journals?*

**RM:** All by direct mail and sample copy offers. I focus heavily on the fact that all my journals are peer-reviewed, top-named people are on the editorial boards, low price per page of publication, and carried by major indexing and abstracting services.

**ATG:** *What kind of circulation do your titles have on average, and how do you price them?*

**RM:** The average circulation for the 17 journals is about 700, with libraries representing about 35% of the total. I have dual pricing. I know how librarians hate to hear this—one for libraries domestic and foreign, and one for professionals. The price for libraries for the first few years is in the range of \$95.00 to \$125.00 for quarterly publications, which represents a good portion of my list.

**ATG:** *Are you doing anything in the electronic or online arena?*

**RM:** Yes. I am being drawn into this arena kicking and screaming. Like most publishers, I have most all of my journals done in electronic formats and I can put them up when I find a way to recover the cost of the investment. I participated while at **Pergamon** in the development of the basics, but when I look around at some of the offerings that the big publishers have on the market, I haven't been able to determine if they can continue the offerings without again raising the hardcover prices. I had hoped to have my Web site available at the time of publication of this interview. It is 90% complete. Talk about missing a marketing opportunity. If your readers are interested in any of our products and catalogs, that old-fashioned stuff is still available. I can be reached at [cogcomm@aol.com](mailto:cogcomm@aol.com).

**ATG:** *What kind of training do you have?*

**RM:** My training is in accounting and management. I educated myself under the GI Bill, for 9 years of night school. I refer to my background as a Rhodes Scholar. It sounds good when you say it, but in print it's wrong. It is really Road Scholar, because I learned everything on the road up to the top.

**ATG:** *Who were some of the people who were at Pergamon back then and where are they today? I really enjoyed Brian Cox's reminiscence in ATG (February 1998, pp.18-20-22 "Circulation Autumn: Some thoughts on forty fulfillment years").*

**RM:** Yes, I did too! **Pergamon** was one of the best companies to work for if you were starting out or had been in the industry for awhile. The reason was that the company was always intentionally understaffed so you not only got to do the job you were hired for but you were always involved in other thing to

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ibility (<http://www.acbc.com>). We have a really cool ad campaign beginning this fall [running in *ATG*], which incorporates an intellectually challenging contest. And we are about to publish the first issue of *It's Academic*, a customer newsletter.

Beyond these visibility initiatives, we understand that the key to our survival is providing value to librarians. Our customers are working with book budgets that are seriously impacted by the rising costs of serials and electronic resources, but they still \*need\* books. We must ensure libraries maximum value for their book-buying dollars, and provide more services like qualitative reviews, shelf-ready processing and cataloging support so that they can stretch those dollars in creative ways.

At the same time, publishers are dealing with their own economic pressures, and these often have a negative impact on the discounts they offer vendors. We need to provide our colleagues in publishing with a good return on their investment to guarantee that we can continue to work together effectively, and we need to do this in a way that allows all of us to prosper.

**ATG:** How many accounts are out there anyway? Is there enough business to go around? And, what's the point of buying a bookseller anymore? Will we see any more consolidation?

**MW:** The number of books published each year continues to grow, and our business continues to increase, in spite of the squeeze on the purchasing power of libraries. It's true that growth these days is partly a matter of vendors trading market share around, but that's not the whole story—particularly in the U.S. where the economy is strong.

Consolidation among book vendors is inevitable. But there are some new markets out there, and new ways to position existing products. Distance education, on-demand publishing, and out-of-print services are some examples.

Six months ago I would have said that the real new market is in the global economy. Things have changed recently, but Asia and Australia are strong markets for Academic, and remain so in spite of the economic downturn there. Eighty-five percent of the resources on the Internet are English-language materials. There continue to be opportunities globally for English language booksellers.

**ATG:** Is there a future for books in the scholarly communication process?

**MW:** There is definitely a future for books in the scholarly process. Obviously, the recreational reader still prefers books. But books continue to play a vital role in the educational and scholarly world too.

Electronic publishing fills important needs for timeliness and rapid distribution. And software does wonderful things. But so far nothing beats books for synthesizing, democratizing and archiving information. Books are user- and scholar-friendly in a way that computers have not yet become.

My daughter recently wrote an article on cocaine addiction. She goes to school in the Philadelphia area and has access to wonderful resources, many of them electronic. But, when she wanted a broad overview, she went to books because they synthesize and bring together concepts and are easier to use.

**ATG:** Janet Flowers and I just did a survey on *ACQNET* on the use of credit cards by acquisitions and collection development departments and the results are reported in this issue of *ATG* (see p. 19). There was an overwhelming response from people actually ordering over the Internet and using credit cards. And a lot of them are using online bookstores like *Amazon.com*. Does this alarm you?

**MW:** People are going where they can get the best deal and I don't blame them. I understand why people like to use credit cards. Everyone likes the free float you get. We buy on credit cards whenever it's feasible too.

But I believe that when a place like *Amazon.com* or *Barnesandnoble.com* attempts to go beyond supplying mainstream, mass market materials, the savings, the speed, and the convenience become considerably less apparent.


Book vendors provide shelf-ready materials, technical processing, and approval plans. The customer service staff at Academic are bibliographic experts, and they perform research services that customers find invaluable.

Opportunities abound for traditional book vendors to form alliances with online bookshops in ways that are not always in competition. We will be discussing this at a Lively Lunch in Charleston in November.

**ATG:** Tell us about yourself. Where did you grow up? Were you trained as a librarian?

**MW:** I grew up in Provo, Utah where *Robert Redford* was a local celebrity. (In fact, he still is, but now more as an environmentalist than as a heart throb!) I got my library degree from Denver University. After that, I lived all around the US—from California to Illinois to Georgia, before finally settling back in the west. My father still lives in Utah and I visit often.

I have a husband and two wonderful children, though I am suddenly an empty-nester since my daughter is at Haverford College (a valued AcBC customer, I might add) and my son has just graduated from high school. He was a non-traditional student, and is now the dairy buyer for a local Whole Foods Market, a wonderful national chain specializing in natural foods. With my husband, I am involved in the *Colorado Music Festival* in Boulder.

I don't have any music training but my husband is a frustrated musician and violinist. He's a lawyer, has been teaching for 25 years and is active in local politics as another outlet for his creative side. 


**NB:** No doubt, we have all heard Martha's husband, *Chris Mueller*, on NPR commenting on contemporary legal issues. Just think, next time you hear him, you will have a connection. And we have to all say "hey" to Martha in Charleston! — KS

## Miranda Interview

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fill gaps. Some of the names that come to mind as former employees are—*Charles Ellis*, President, *Wiley*, *Barbara Colson*, President, *Cambridge Univ. Press*. *Pieter Bolman*, President, *Academic Press*, *Phyllis Hall*, Publishing Director, *IEEE*, and *Al Henderson*, Consultant, just to name a few.

**ATG:** We can't end this interview without talking about *Library Acquisitions: Practice and Theory*. I believe that you and *Scott Bullard* started that journal many years ago. And we are reporting a title change in this issue of *ATG*—*LAPT* will become *Library Collections, Acquisitions and Technical Services* with the 1999 volume.

**RM:** This bring back good memories. Over a couple of beers, Scott said it was about time *Pergamon* did something for the library community and the journal evolved. The concept was to bring out a quarterly journal at a low price similar to other library journals published by *ALA*, etc. and to service the acquisitions industry. The price was held steady for over five years, which was unheard of out of *Pergamon*. Boy, did I take heat on the pricing structure! I recall the review of the first issue was disastrous. If you remember, Scott had great knowledge but was not always a company type of guy. With this poor review, we regrouped and it survives today under *Carol Hawks Diedrichs* as Editor-in-Chief. Also I would be negligent not to point out that at one time, if you recall *Katina*, that *LAPT* and *Pergamon* were to be involved in the *Charleston Conference* as a management group. Fortunately, for you, this did not occur, but the compromise was that papers from the conference would first appear in *LAPT*. This now takes us back to *Asti's*. Thanks for the opportunity to appear in *ATG*. I too am sorry to miss this year's meeting. See you next year! 

**NB:** Unfortunately, Bob will not be in Charleston for us to talk personally with him about this interview. But — next year? Plus there's always email and even—gasp—the telephone! — KS